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ditions of city or village life. The matter must rest here until further statistics are available.

W. J. SPILLMAN

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

THE RELATION OF THE METER AND THE YARD

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: It is a matter of astonishment to me that so many men, authors of scientific books, are ignorant of the fact that the relation between the meter and the yard is in the United States fixed by law, viz., 1 meter = 39.37 inches. In England the established relation is 1 meter = 39.370113 inches. As examples, see "Fortie's Electrical Engineers' Handbook," 5th Ed., 1908, p. 1500, and "Eggleston's Tables of Weights and Measures," 4th Ed., 1900, p. viii, in both of which the archaic, inherited necessary relation, 1 meter = 39.37079 inches is adopted. In trade catalogues an error of this sort is not so serious and is occasionally made; but in a scientific publication it is unpardonable.

MARSHALL D. EWELL

SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Primitive Secret Societies. A Study in Early Politics and Religion. By HUTTON WEBSTER, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology and Anthropology in the University of Nebraska. New York, The Macmillan Co. 1908. Pp. xiii + 227.

This book, which has served in its original form as a thesis for the doctorate in political science at Harvard University, treats, in eleven chapters, of the men's house, the puberty institution, the secret rites, the training of the novice, the power of the elders, development of tribal societies, functions of tribal societies, decline of tribal societies, the clan ceremonies, magical fraternities, diffusion of initiation ceremonies. The author's studies were concluded before he became acquainted with the late Dr. Heinrich Schurtz's "Altersklassen und Männerbünde" (Berlin, 1902), of which, however, he was able to make some use in the present monograph. The book of Schurtz, rather *tendenziös* in places and somewhat marred by a philological appendix, but, nevertheless, an interesting and valuable

summary of facts, was preceded by Boas's (1895-7) investigations of the social organization and secret societies of the Indian tribes of the North Pacific coast (particularly the Kwakiutl), which still remain the best source of information for that region, as yet not adequately used by any authority. For the Plains tribes we have recent investigations by Wissler, Dorsey, Fletcher, Kroeber, and for the Pueblos Indians, those of Fewkes, etc. The material in Dr. Webster's book, as is the case with all others dealing generally with the topic of secret societies and ceremonies, is preponderatingly Australasian, Indonesian and African, though at pages 15-19 ("men's house"), 131-134 (age-societies), 147-159 (clan-ceremonies) and 176-190 (magical fraternities), the aborigines of the new world receive particular attention.

The author begins with the "men's house," described as follows:

The men's house is usually the largest building in a tribal settlement. It belongs in common to the villagers; it serves as council-chamber and town hall, as a guest-house for strangers, and as the sleeping resort of the men. Frequently seats in the house are assigned to elders and other leading individuals according to their dignity and importance. Here the more precious belongings of the community, such as trophies taken in war or in the chase, and religious emblems of various sorts, are preserved. Within its precincts, women and children, and men not fully initiated members of the tribe, seldom or never enter. When marriage and exclusive possession of a woman do not follow immediately upon initiation into the tribe, the institution of the men's house becomes an effective restraint upon the sexual proclivities of the unmarried youth. It then serves as a club-house for the bachelors, whose residence within it may be regarded as a perpetuation of that formal seclusion of the lads from women, which it is the purpose of the initiation ceremonies in the first place to accomplish. Such communal living on the part of the young men is a visible token of their separation from the narrow circle of the family, and of their introduction to the duties and responsibilities of tribal life. The existence of such an institution emphasizes the fact that a settled family life with a private abode is the privilege of the older men, who alone have marital rights over the women of the tribe. For promiscuity,